

CHAPTEH

III *SOCIETY AND
POLITICS,*

STATE AND GRIEVANCES OF THE COUNTRY. THE
STBUGGLE OF THE COMMONS TO OBTAIN GOOD
GOVERNMENT. EXPERIMENTS AND FAILUBB. WYCLIFFE
A8 A ^OKITICIAN

THE period that is ushered in by the accession of
Kleharcl the Second, and that culminates in the
portentous disaster of the Peasants* Bising, is
one of great activity on the part of the Lower
House. Before entering on a detailed account of
the history of these years, it will be well to
consider more particularly than in the lust
chapter what were tho aims and what the
difficulties of tho Commons. Thoy were engaged
in seeking a remedy for certain social evila
closely connected with the political
miscarriage. Government could not be reformed
until society had been remodelled. Tho
Commons failed to amend either the one or the
other* Both the local and central machinery of
medieval England foil into the weltering ruin
of the Wars of the Hoses, whence a new
society emerged under the Tudor Kings,

One of the chief subjects of complaint and
petition by the Commons at this period is the
state of the navy and the mercantile marine.

IB the days of the early Plantageneta the
shipping of these islands consisted of little
more than coasting vessels and fishing*boats.
The trade with the Continent was carried on in
foreign bottoms, and the English were known to
the merchants of Italy, Flanders, and North
Germany as an agricultural and pastoral people
whose wool and other ra*w material were well
worth the fetching.¹ IB the early years of

¹ CannljDffh&m, 181.